

Seneca, born in Cordova, Spain about 4 B.C., died in Rome 65 A.D. and was a devote Stoic, following in the tradition of the Greek Zeno, the Pre-socratic father of the Stoic view of the human world. The essence of stoic philosophy was *apatheia*, literally, *being apathetic*, that is, living in the world in a *non-feeling* way. Zeno and, of course, Seneca viewed the human being as an animal with *logos*, or *reason* and advised humans, as other animals to seek self-preservation, however, humans sought self-preservation in terms of that which was noblest, namely, as the self-preservation of *reason*. The way the Stoic sought to achieve this self-preservation of *reason* is to live an *apathetic* living, that is not allowing *reason* to be affected by *pathos*, or *pathetic* feelings of the body whether of pleasure or of pain. As Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor and perhaps the major Latin Stoic observed:

Your directing reason (*logos*) the ruler of your soul, must remain unaffected by the activity of your flesh, whether painful or pleasurable. It must not mingle with it but stay within its own frontiers and confine the affections of the body to their own sphere. When, however, these affections reach the mind through the other channel of common feeling, since both exist in a body organically one, then we should not resist this perception of them, since it is natural; but the directing reason should not add to this any judgment of its own as to whether the bodily affections are good or bad. (Bk. 5, #26, *Meditations*.)

The stoic sought to live a life of self-sufficient freedom and the freedom consisted in living a non-feeling life, that is, a life impervious to disturbance of any kind, be that pleasant or painful emotions. This life was lived as a balanced one by cleaving to reason and, therefore, as detached from the mortality and passions of the body in which the soul lived this human life. Thus, both the Greek and Latin stoic viewed the body as a hindrance to reason, reason being the presence of the divine within the human being. Indeed, the stoic looked upon the world as a place in which *Divine Reason* was embodied, thereby, drawing upon the view of Heraclitus that the ordering principle within the world of nature was *Logos*, Divine Reason Itself. The stoics as humans, therefore, sought perfection in the achievement of perfect reason, a reason such that nothing disturbed the person's attempt to live according to reason, that is, without passion, whether pleasurable or painful.

Remember that your ruling spirit is invincible when it is withdrawn into itself and satisfied with itself, not doing what it does not wish to do, even if the stand it takes is unreasonable. How will it be then when its judgment is reasonable and prudent? That is why a mind free from passions is a citadel and a man has no more secure refuge to make him safe for the future. He who has not seen this is stupid; he who has seen it and has not taken refuge there is unfortunate. (Bk. 8, # 48, *Meditations*.)

So, if living this life as a human occasioned a situation in which the person could no longer live as "detached" and, thus, impervious to disturbance, then the stoic sought suicide as the option to continued living.

Seneca lived contemporaneous with Paul of Tarsus, the celebrated St. Paul of the New Testament letters. Indeed, Tarsus was a center of stoic philosophy and, of course, notwithstanding the fact that Paul was a rabbinical student, having studied in Rome under the Rabbi Gamaliel, the great Doctor of the Pharisees, he also was educated in Hellenic studies. Paul became a convert from his allegiance to the Pharisaical school to the Christ of the New Testament about 36 A.D. Yet, no historical evidence testifies that the two men ever met. Paul, as a Roman prisoner did stand trial before Seneca's brother, L. Junius Gallio when the latter was Proconsul of Achaia, as Luke states within The Acts of the Apostles (xviii, 12f).

However, early Catholic Christian writers, as Jerome, Lactantius, St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo and Tertullian give Seneca high commendation. Even the Council of Trent refers to Seneca as one of the Fathers of the Church! Nevertheless, the scholar Lightfoot concludes that the similarities, even parallels of Seneca's thinking and New Testament thinking can not argue conclusively to Seneca ever having adopted Catholic Christianity:

But after all allowance made for the considerations just urged, some facts remain which still require explanation. It appears that the Christian parallels in Seneca's writings become more frequent as he advances in life. It is not less true that they are much more striking and more numerous than in the other great stoics of the Roman period, Epictetus and M. Aurelius. (Epistle to the Philippians, 3d edition, pp. 289-296 (London, 1873))

So much for introductory remarks concerning Seneca, now the first of his two letters concerning suicide and his letter concerning the perfection of human life follow and I take responsibility for these translations:

Moral Letters, Vol. II, Letter XXVII (77), To Tullius Marcellinus

Tullius Marcellinus, a man whom you knew very well, who in youth was a quiet soul and because old prematurely, fell ill of a disease which was by no means hopeless, however, it was protracted and troublesome and it demanded much attention. Hence, the man began to think of dying. He called many of his friends together and Marcellinus asked each for advice. The timid friend urged him to do what he had made up his mind to do; the flattering and wheedling friend gave counsel which he supposed would be more pleasing to Marcellinus when he came to think the matter over. Our Stoic friend, however, a rare man and, to praise him in language he deserves, a man of courage and vigor,¹

¹ This is a typical Roman compliment. The Greeks would have said "beautiful goodness" as Horace did within an Epistle, 1.7.46.

This author provided a brief history of suicide in relation to the establishment of laws against suicide within the notes to this Ethics course, specifically within the "Preface".

Seneca addresses the issue of suicide mainly because the Roman Senate of his time made suicide illegal in three cases: first, if a slave

admonished him best of all, as it seems to me. The Stoic began:

Do not torment yourself, my dear Marcellinus, as if the question you are weighing were a matter of importance. It is not an important matter to live; all your slaves live and so do all animals; but it is important to die honorably, sensibly, bravely. Reflect how long you have been doing the same thing: eating, sleeping and lusting - this is one's daily round. The desire to die may be felt, not only by the sensible man or the brave or unhappy man, but even by the man who is satiated.

Marcellinus did not need someone to urge him, but rather someone to help him. His slaves refused to do his bidding.² The Stoic, therefore removed their fears, showing them that there was no risk involved for the household except when it was uncertain whether the master's death was self-sought or not. Besides, it was as bad a practice to kill one's master as it was to prevent him forcibly from killing himself. Then, he suggested to Marcellinus himself that it would be a kindly act to distribute gifts to those who had attended him throughout his whole life, when that life was finished, just as, when a banquet is finished. The remaining portion is then divided among the attendants who stand about the table.

committed suicide to deprive his master of the capital investment of being a slave; secondly, if a soldier committed suicide in order to keep from serving within the Roman military; if a criminal committed suicide to avoid a trial or to avoid his or her sentencing by a Roman court - all of these "reasons" were economic, however and not based on religious or ethical grounds.

Of course, philosophically, stoics faced the fact that Plato held that suicide was an affront to the god(s), refusing the gift of life and the general Roman society's argument was that if a person had such disregard as to commit suicide, such a person would be more likely to disregard other people's lives and such disregard could cause public disorder. Seneca, therefore, sought to argue the case for suicide from the stoic view of living an *apathetic* life and the stoic search for perfect freedom of mind from the passions.

² Two reasons exist for this reluctance. First, Roman law made suicide illegal for any one of three reasons: first, if a Roman citizen committed suicide to escape paying taxes; secondly, if a citizen committed suicide to escape being prosecuted for some illegal act; thirdly, if a citizen committed suicide to escape his obligation to enter the Roman army or to escape the carrying out of an order. The second reason is that slaves would be liable for death if they acted against their owner/master.

Marcellinus was of a compliant and generous disposition, even when it was a question of his own property, so he distributed little sums among his sorrowing slaves and comforted them besides. No need has he of sword or of bloodshed. He fasted for three days and had a tent put up in his very bedroom.³ Then the tub was brought in and he lay in it for a long time. As the hot water was continually poured over him, he gradually passed away, not without a feeling of pleasure, as he himself remarked – such a feeling as a slow dissolution is want to give. Those of us who have ever fainted know from experience what this feeling is.

This little anecdote into which I have digressed will not be displeasing to you. For you will see that your friend departed neither with difficulty nor with suffering. Though he committed suicide, yet, he withdrew most gently, gliding out of life. The anecdote may also be of some use; for often a crisis demands just such examples. There are times when we ought to die and are unwilling; sometimes we die and are unwilling. No one is so ignorant as not to know that we must at some time die; nevertheless, when one draws near death, one turns to flight, troubles and laments. Would you not think him an utter fool who wept because he was not alive a thousand years ago? And is he not just as much of a fool who weeps because he will not be alive a thousand years from now? It is all the same. You will not be and you were not. Neither of these periods of time belongs to you. You have been cast upon this point of time. If you would make it longer, how much longer shall you make it? Why weep? Why pray? You are taking pains to no purpose:

Give over thinking that your prayers can bend Divine decrees from their predestined end.⁴

These decrees are unalterable and fixed. They are governed by a mighty and everlasting compulsion. Your goal will be the goal of all things. What is there strange in this to you? You were born to be subject to this law. This fate befell your father, your mother, your ancestors, all who came before you and will befall all who shall come after you. This sequence cannot be broken or altered by any power which binds all things together and draws all things in its course. Think of the multitudes of men doomed to death who will come after you, of the multitudes who will go with you! You would die more bravely, I suppose, in the company of many thousands and, yet, there are many thousands, both of men and of animals, who at this very moment, while you are irresolute about death who are breathing their last in their several ways. But, did you believe that you would not some day reach the goal towards which you have always been travelling? No journey exists but has its end.

You think, I suppose, that it is now in order for me to cite

³ The tent conserved the steam and thus, intensified the heat.

⁴ Vergil, *Aeneid*, vi. 376.

some examples of great people. No, I shall cite rather the case of a boy. The story of the Spartan lad has been preserved. Taken captive while still a stripling, he kept crying in his Doric dialect, "I will not be a slave!" and he made good his word. The very first time he was ordered to perform a menial and degrading service (the command was to fetch a chamber-pot), he dashed out his brains against the wall. So near at hand is freedom, is anyone still a slave? Would you not rather have your own son die thus than reach old age by weakly yielding? Why, therefore, are you distressed when even a boy can die so bravely? Suppose that you refuse to follow him; you will be led. Take into your own control that which is not under the control of another. Will you not borrow that boy's courage and say: "I am no slave!"? Unhappy fellow, you are a slave to life. For life, if courage to die be lacking, is slavery.⁵

Have you anything worth waiting for? Your very pleasures, which cause you to tarry and hold you back, have already been exhausted by you. None of them is a novelty to you and there is not one which has not already become hateful because you are cloyed with it. You know the taste of wine and cordials. It makes no difference whether a hundred or a thousand measures pass through your bladder. You are nothing but a wine-strainer. You are a connoisseur in the flavor of the oyster and of the mullet. Your luxury has not left you anything untasted for the years which are to come and, yet, these are the things from which you are torn

⁵ I find this conclusion ironic. Why does Seneca and, indeed, the "died in the wool" followers of Zeno end with this question? Why is not the opposite question not more compelling, namely, "For you die, if courage to live be lacking"! Indeed, whether or not taking one's life, that is, committing suicide for whatever Stoic reason is or is not courageous is clearly unknown. The Stoics call the decision to commit suicide and the taking of one's own life "courageous", but that is merely a name and no one can state definitively whether or not the action is virtuous - unless, that is, one can verify the person's motivation. However, it is demonstrably clear that a person who lives, notwithstanding the suffering and who does so because to be alive is a gift *is* courageous. Indeed, the Stoic statement that it is how a human being dies that is virtuous begs the question. Rather it is how a human being lives, notwithstanding the problems, sufferings and "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that determines how that human being dies!

Notwithstanding Seneca's argument for suicide within these first two letters, see footnote 18 and its context for a contradiction within this very argument of Seneca's.

away unwillingly. What else is there which you would regret to have taken from you? Friends? But who can be a friend to you? Country? What? Do you think enough of your country to be late to dinner? The light of the sun? You would extinguish it if you could, for what have you ever done which was fit to be seen in the light?⁶ Confess the truth. It is not because you long for the senate-chamber or the forum or even for the world of nature that you would fain put off dying. It is because you are loth to leave the fish-market, though you have exhausted its stores.

You are afraid of death, but how can you scorn it in the midst of a mushroom supper?⁷ You wish to live. Well, do you know how to live? You are afraid to die. But come now: is this life of yours anything but death?⁸ Gaius Caesar was passing along the *Via Latina* (literally, the *Latin Way*) when a man stepped out from the ranks of the prisoners, his grey beard hanging down even to his breast and begged to be put to death. "What!", said Caesar, "are you alive now?" That is the answer which should be given to men to whom death would come as a relief. "You are afraid to die. What!, are you alive now?" "But," says one, "I wish to live for I am engaged in many honorable pursuits. I am loth to leave life's duties which I am fulfilling with loyalty and zeal". Surely, you are aware that dying is also one of life's duties? You are deserting no duty for there is no definite number of years established which you are bound to complete. There is no life that is not short. Compared with the world of nature, even Nestor's

⁶ One wonders what occasioned the Stoic attitude which is the cause of the deep and broad negativity, even pessimism with which these stoics view the world and the self-worth of being a unique human being? Even the "death camps" experienced by Victor Frankl did not produce such a dark and pessimistic view of the world, fellow humans and self, as is clear when one reads his *The Meaning of Man*.

⁷ The Roman Emperor, Claudius scorned the thought of dying as he indulged himself in a supper of mushroom soup!

⁸ In my view, living is what humans do while they are awaiting death, however, this view is very non-Stoic. That living is what humans do while they are waiting to die places the emphasis on how one lives one's life, not on what happens to one while living. Indeed, no human being can control anything which comes into one's life. The only thing a human being can do is control what comes out of the self, that is, how one reacts to or acts toward whatever happens to one as one lives his or her life.

life was a short one, or Sattis's, the woman who bade carve on her tombstone that she had lived ninety and nine years. Some persons, you see, (are a) beast of their long lives But who could have endured the old lady if she had had the luck to complete her one hundredth year? It is with life, as it is with a play: it matters not how long the action is spun out, but how good the acting is. It makes no difference at what point you stop. Stop whenever you choose.⁹ Only see to it that the closing period is well turned. Farewell.

⁹ Again, an irony exists in Seneca's thinking. If, as he says, we compare living life with acting in a play and, if, as he observes, the issue is how the acting of the character portrayed in the play is, then we must logically conclude that the actor must await the end of the play as the playwright wrote it. How is it then that Seneca uses this analogy and then states that the actor may "opt out" at any time? This conclusion does not logically follow from the analogy he makes. So also, if this world is a play, written by some divine playwright and each of us is an actor following the script, then does it not make sense to accept the natural outcome of the playwright's play? In other words, if humans are born into this world from the womb, as it were naturally, does it not follow that these same humans should exit this world naturally as death is written into the script?

Seneca's Letter 70 , one of the some 124 to his friend, Lucilius specifically addresses the issue of Suicide.

Seneca's Letter 70 , Suicide

I have been looking over your home town of Pompeii, where I had not been for a long time and it gave me a vista of my youth. The things I did there as a young man I thought I could still do and had, in fact, done only a little while ago. We have sailed past life, Lucilius, and, as Virgil says of the sea, "lands and cities recede", so in this flight of time we lose sight first of our boyhood, then of our adolescence, then of the interval between youth and old age which occupies the marches of both and then of the best years of old age itself. Last of all, the common end of human kind hoves into view. We think it a reef, fools that we are. Actually, it is a haven, sometimes to be welcomed, never to be refused and, if a man makes this harbor in his early years, he ought no more complain than a traveler who makes a quick passage. One voyager, as you know, is bemused and detained by sluggish winds and grows sick and tired of creeping through the calm. Another is carried to his destination speedily by a steady blow.

Fancy that our course is the same. Some life brings speedily to the bourn they were bound to reach even if they tarried; others it torments and frets. Such a life, as you know, it is not always advisable to hold on to. Living is not the good, but living well is. The wise person, therefore, lives as long as he should, not as long as he can. Such a person will observe where he is to live, with whom, how and what he is to do. The wise will always think of life in terms of quality, not quantity. If a wise person encounters many vexations which disturb his tranquility, that person will release himself. The wise will do this not only in an extreme exigency, but as soon as he begins to suspect Fortune. The wise person will look about him carefully to determine whether he ought to have done, that is, quit life. The wise person will consider it of no importance whether he causes his end or merely accepts it, whether late or early. Such a person does not shrink as before some great deprivation, for not much can be lost from a trickle. Dying early or late is of no relevance, dying well or ill is. To die well is to escape the danger of living ill.

That is why I regard the familiar Rhodian's saying as most unmanly. A tyrant had thrown him into a dungeon where he was fed like some wild beast and, when someone urged him to starve himself, he said: "While there is life, there is hope". Even if this were true, life is not to be bought at all costs. However splendid a thing may be, however certain its acquisition, I will not come at it by acknowledging my lack of character. Should my motto be "Fortune is all-powerful over the living," when it can be "Fortune is powerless over one who knows how to die?"

Nevertheless, if certain death impends and a wise person knows he is doomed to torture, such a person will *not* do his executioner's work; he will do his own (by staying alive). It is folly to die for fear of dying. A man will come to kill you; wait for him. Why take the initiative? Why take on the discharge of someone else's cruel assignment? Is it because you envy the executioner his job or because you want to spare him? Socrates might have ended his life by fasting and have died of starvation rather than poison, yet he spent thirty days in jail awaiting death. His motive was nothing like "Anything can happen", or "While there is time, there's room for hope", but to conform to the laws and make the ultimate Socrates profitable to his friends. Could anything have been more stupid than to despise death and be afraid of poison?

Scribonia was an austere woman. She was the aunt of your Drusus Libo, who was as stupid as he was noble and aspired to a higher station than anyone could hope for in his time or he himself at any time. When Libo was carried out of the senate in a litter, sick, he had a very small retinue, for all his connections deserted him - disloyalty, for he was no longer a culprit but virtually a corpse. He held a consultation on whether he should compass his death or await it. Said Scribonia: "Why are you pleased to do another man's business?" She failed to convince him and he laid hands upon himself, and, with some justification, for if a man is sure to die in two or three days at his enemy's pleasure, then by living he is "doing another man's business".

So, you cannot make a universally applicable pronouncement on the advisability of anticipating or awaiting death when an outside power has decreed it. There are many considerations to incline us to either view. If one death involves torture and the other is simple and easy, why not reach for the easier way? Just as I choose a ship to sail in or a house to live in, so I choose a death for my passage from life. Moreover, whereas a prolonged life is not necessarily better, a prolonged death is necessarily worse. Nowhere should we indulge the soul more than in dying. Let it go as it lists: if it craves the sword or the doses of some potion which constricts the veins, on with it; let it break the chain of its slavery. A human's life should satisfy other people as well, his death only himself and whatever sort he likes is best. There is no sense in thinking: "X will say that I lacked fortitude; Y that I was too impulsive; Z that another kind of death would have shown higher spirit". Think rather: "What people say is irrelevant to the proposal in hand". Your sole object is to wrench free of Fortune with the greatest expedition; there will always be people to disapprove of what you have done.

You will find even professed philosophers who assert that a human being may not do violence to his own life and pronounce it sinful for a person to be his own executioner; we must wait, they say, for the end Nature has decreed. The person who says this does not see that he has blocked his road to freedom. Eternal law has never been more generous than in affording us so many exits from

life to one entry. Must I wait for the pangs of disease or the cruelty of humans when I can stride through the midst of torment and shake my adversaries off? This is the one reason we cannot complain of life: it holds no one back. The situation of humanity is good in that no one is wretched except by his own fault. If you like, live; if you do not like, you can go back where you came from. Frequently you let blood to relieve headache. To lighten your body you have had incisions cut in your veins. There is no need of a gaping wound to cleave your chest; a scalpel opens the way out to the great emancipation, a prick makes you carefree.

What is it, then, which makes humans stolid and slow to move? None of us thinks that he must one day move from his apartment; just so, attachment to a place and habit keeps old tenants from moving even when they are ill used. Do you want to be free despite your body? Live in it as if you were ready to move. Keep in mind that you will one day lose your quarters and you will have greater fortitude for the necessary departure. But how can a human being keep his own end in mind if there is no end to his craving? Yet, it is most essential to keep our end in mind. Other exercises may prove futile. Train your soul against poverty and you may stay rich. Arm yourself to scorn pain; your health may continue safe and sound and never put your virtue to the test. Teach yourself to bear the loss of loved one's bravely and all of them will happily survive you. This one training *must* one day be put to use.

Do not imagine that only great human beings have had the toughness to break through the trammels of human bondage. Do not suppose that it can only be done by a Cato, who used his hand to wrench loose the life his sword had not released. Persons of the meanest condition have made a mighty effort to break through to deliverance and, when they were not allowed to die at their discretion or choose their instruments for dying, they snatched up whatever was ready to hand and by their own strength transformed implements naturally harmless into weapons. Lately, a German in the beast-fighting barracks who was practicing for the morning show excused himself to relieve his bowels - the only function for which the guards would allow him privacy. Then he took the sponge-tipped stick used as a torchecul and rammed it down his throat and choked his breath till he suffocated. That was a way to insult death! Yes, indeed, not very clean or very nice, but how stupid to be fastidious about dying! Stout fellow, the right man to let choose his own fate! How gallantly he would have used a sword, how coolly he would have leaped into the sea's abyss or down a sheer precipice! But though he was deprived of every resource, he contrived a scheme and a weapon to use - from which you can learn that there is nothing to keep a person from dying but the will. Every person can have his own opinion of that keen fellow's act, but on this all will agree: the dirtiest death is preferable to the daintiest slavery.

Since I have begun with vulgar exemplars I shall keep on. A person will demand more of himself if he sees that people he despises can despise death. The Catos, the Scipios and the others,

we are used to reading about with wonder, tower too high for our imitation. Now I shall demonstrate that the virtue we are speaking of has as many exemplars in the beast-fighting barracks as among Civil War generals. Recently when a gladiator was being carted to the morning show under guard he simulated sleep and nodded his head far enough down to get it between the spokes and kept his seat until the turning wheel broke his neck. The very tumbrel that was carrying him to punishment he used to escape it.

Nothing stands in the way of a person who wants to break loose and get away. Nature's corral is an open space and, when pressure reaches the allowable point, a man can look around for an easy exit. If a number of devices for claiming freedom are available, a person can exercise choice and consider what mode of liberation is best for him. But, if opportunity is difficult, let him snatch the nearest means as the best, though it be unprecedented, though it be novel. If you have the courage to die, you will have the ingenuity. You see how the lowliest chattel slaves are aroused under the goads of suffering and deceive the most attentive guards. It is a great person who not only orders his own death but contrives it.

I promised you more examples from the same exhibitions. In the second event of a sea-fight spectacle one of the barbarians sank the whole spear which he was to use against his opponents down his own throat. "Why," he cried, "have I not long ago escaped all this torment, all this mockery? Why? Why do I wait for death, with a weapon in my hand?" The show was better worth looking at in the degree that people learned that it is more decent to die than to kill.

What is the upshot? Shall humans whom long meditation and Mistress Reason, who teaches all things, have equipped to meet such contingencies not possess as much spirit as abandoned and lawless types? Reason teaches us that the approaches of fate are many but its end the same and that it makes no difference where what must come begins. The same reason teaches you to die as you like if you may, but if not, as you can and to use whatever comes your way for laying hands upon yourself. To live by violence is unfair; to die by violence is the fairest of all. Farewell.

Letter 92 (XCII), another one of the some 124 to his friend, Lucilius specifically addresses the issue of The Happy Life .

The purposes of including this letter within the context of the other two which directly address suicide are twofold. The first reason is that this letter lays bare Seneca's view of the end or purpose of human life and thus, provides the context wherein the claim for suicide relates to the Stoic in relation to life and living humanly. The second reason is that the arguments concerning living a life of pain or living a life without a "perfect" body and mind are the same arguments used within the United States today in states such as Oregon, with people who advocate **euthanasia** , literally, **eu**, well and **thanasia**, dying, so its meaning is dying well, and with people insisting upon the analysis of a divided-cell within a pregnant women to determine whether or not a "defect" exists and, thereby to determine whether or not to abort the "defective" fetus. The letter of Seneca on The Happy Life follows:

Letter 92 (XCII), The Happy Life

You and I are at one, I assume, in holding that externals are acquired for the sake of the body, that the body is tended out of respect for the soul and that the agencies of the soul which direct motion and sustenance are given us for the sake of the essential soul. The essential soul has an irrational factor and also a rational one. The irrational serves the rational (**logos**) and is the one element which is not referred to something else but refers all things to itself. The Divine Reason (**Logos**) too is sovereign over all things and subordinate to none and our reason (**logos**) possesses the same quality because it is derived from the Divine Reason (**Logos**).¹⁰

If we are at one on this point, it follows that we shall be at one also on the proposition that the happy life depends solely on our reason being perfect. Only perfect reason keeps the soul from being submissive and stands firm against Fortune. Only reason assures self-sufficiency in whatever situation. Reason is the one good which can never be impinged upon. A human being is happy, I maintain, when no circumstance can reduce him; he keeps to the heights and uses no buttress but himself, for a person sustained by a bolster is liable to fall. If this is not so, then many

¹⁰ The fact is that Zeno and subsequent Stoics relied heavily upon the **Fragments** and world view of Heraclitus, the Pre-socratic but, as we shall see, they did so for their own purposes and were not true to the texts and view of Heraclitus.

factors outside ourselves will begin to have power over us. But who wishes Fortune to be paramount or what prudent man preens himself on what is not his?¹¹

What is the happy life? The happy life is self-sufficiency and abiding tranquility. This is the gift of greatness of soul, the gift of constancy which perseveres in a course judged right. How can these attitudes be attained? By surveying truth in its entirety, by safeguarding in every action order, measure, decorum, a will which is without malice and thus benign, focused undeviatingly upon reason, at once amiable and admirable. I shall summarize in a brief formula: The wise person's soul should have the quality of a god's. What can a person desire if he possesses everything honorable? If the dishonorable can contribute to the optimum state, then the happy life will be comprised of elements other than honorable. What could be meaner or stupider than to weave the good of the rational soul out of irrational strands?

Yet, there are those who hold that the supreme good can be augmented because it is incomplete when Fortune makes inroads upon it. Antipater, a major authority of this school, says that he makes allowances, albeit very slight ones, to externals. But you see how absurd it is not to be content with daylight unless a tiny flame adds its illumination. What contribution can a spark make in bright sunlight? If the honorable alone does not satisfy you, then you must desire either the repose which the Greeks call aokhlesia, literally, undisturbedness, or else pleasure. But, the first can be had in any case; when the mind is at liberty to survey the universe and nothing distracts it from the contemplation of nature it is free of disturbance. The second,

¹¹ The Stoic attitude, following upon their conviction that the way to live a happy life was to live in apathy, that is, without being moved by feelings, centers upon the mind and the mind's strength to control primarily the body for the sake of the essential soul. So, to the Stoic mental control of oneself within this world is the center of Stoic philosophy.

However, no Stoic and no stoic documents this author has read has ever reconciled or explained the two "controlling" principles which frequently occur within these stoic texts, that is, Fortune and Divine Reason. Even today, many people stand confused over these two supposed "forces", Fortune which the stoics looked upon as an arbitrary and capricious force, even negative toward humans and Divine Reason which the stoics viewed as being the source of order within nature.

Thus, human reason was thought by the stoics to be the one human force which could counteract any external control of Fortune or, indeed, any internal control of Divine Reason. Thus, human control through personal choice became the focus of stoic emphasis as the source of a happy life.

pleasure is the good of cattle; this is to add the irrational to the rational, the dishonorable to the honorable. Physical titillation contributes to pleasure; why do you boggle at saying that a human being is in a good state if his appetite is in a good state? Would you count as a human being (I will not say a true person) one whose supreme good consists of flavors and colors and sounds? Such a person should be crossed off the roster of the noblest of all living species which is second only to the gods. An animal whose delight is in fodder should herd with cattle.

The irrational part of the soul has two divisions: one spirited, ambitious, headstrong, swayed by passion and the other passive, un-forceful, devoted to pleasure. The former is unbridled but yet of better quality and at least more stalwart and virile. (However,) these philosophers have neglected and have deemed the latter, nerveless and abject as it is, essential to the happy life. They have put reason under its orders and have made the supreme good of the noblest of creatures a thing spineless and ignoble, a monstrous hybrid, moreover, compounded of ill-assorted and badly joined members. As Virgil says in his description of Scylla (*Aeneid*, 3.426ff):

A human face above, a maiden with beauteous bosom;
Below a monstrous mass, wolf's belly, dolphin's tail.

The beasts attached to Scylla are at least horrendous and fleet; but of what monstrosities has that school constructed wisdom! The human being's prime art is virtue unqualified. Subjoined to it is useless and ephemeral flesh, fit only as Posidonius says, for receiving food. Then divine virtue tapers off to vileness and to the revered and celestial portions above there is mortised a sluggish and nerveless beast. Repose, the other factor, does not of itself serve the rational human soul, but it eliminates obstacles; pleasure actually unties the human soul and blunts all its force. Can you imagine a union of such inharmonious bodies? The most nerveless is built onto the most strenuous, the frivolous onto the most austere, the intemperate and even the iniquitous onto the most sacred.¹²

"Well then," says the opposition, "if virtue is not impeded by good health and repose and freedom from pain will you not seek these things?"

Of course I shall not, however, because they are goods but because they are in accordance with nature and because I shall avail

¹² This Stoic negativity toward the human body, indeed, as in this case, Seneca calling it "iniquitous", that is, base and tending to evil found its way into both Luther's and Calvin's thinking and their "Christian" view of life on this planet earth.

myself of this: proper choice. When I put on clothing which is appropriate, when I walk as I should, when I die as becomes me, it is not the dinner or the walk or the clothing which are good but my own program of observing in every act a measure which conforms to reason. I must add that choice of becoming clothing is a ***desideratum***¹³, for a man is by nature a tidy and well-groomed animal.¹⁴ Becoming clothing is, therefore not a good ***per se*** (that is, *in itself*), but the choice of becoming clothing is; the good lies not in the thing (such as clothing) but in the quality of selection (that is, the intention of the person choosing). Our modes of action, not the things we do, are honorable.¹⁵ My remarks about clothing you may apply to the body, for it is a sort of garment with which Nature has clothed the soul. The body is the soul's sheath. But who has ever valued clothes by the rack? The scabbard does not make a sword good or bad. In regard to the body, then, my response will be the same: If I have the choice, I shall take health and strength, but the good involved will not be these things ***per se*** (that is, *in themselves*), but my choice of them.¹⁶

¹³ This Latin expression means: *something to be desired*, an expression which one may find within an English dictionary as a Latin cognate used as such in English.

¹⁴ This paragraph provides the reader with a combination of being an ethical person and with being a moral person. The fact that Seneca observes that the *how* of dressing, walking and dying is a person's individual choice emphasizes being ethical; however, his comments about dressing as a "tidy and well-groomed animal" passes over into the realm of public morals, or, in general a country's customs and emphasizes the human being as a moral being.

¹⁵ Or, indeed, the things humans may do may be dishonorable, as the choice may be, if, that is, they are not acted according to nature.

¹⁶ This Stoic choice follows upon their view of the human self, not their view of God as Divine Reason. No Stoic in any writing this author has read has ever offered any suggestion that the Stoic God, as Divine Reason present within the world of nature provided this view of the human body. Of course, many things so-called Christians state to be true can not be found anywhere within the *New Testament* either. Indeed, in the case of both Martin Luther and, more explicitly in John Calvin both nature and the human nature, specifically the body is corrupt, consequent upon their interpretation of what Christians, both Protestant and Catholic refer to as "original sin" as

"Granted that the wise man is happy," says the opposition, "yet such a person does not attain the supreme good unless the natural appliances for it are available to him. The possessor of virtue may not indeed be wretched, but neither can he be very happy if he lacks such natural goods as health and soundness of limbs." You concede the point which seems harder to believe, that a person beset by acute and unremitting pain is not wretched and even happy, but deny the easier point, that he is very happy. But, if the efficacy of virtue keeps a man from being wretched, it is certainly capable of making him very happy, for the interval between happy and very happy is less than between wretched and happy. If the force is strong enough to snatch a man from disaster and set him among the happy, it is surely capable of adding the touch which will make him very happy. Will its strength fail at the top of the rise? There are commodities in life and discommodities, both outside our control.¹⁷ If a good person is not wretched despite the presence of all discommodities, will that person not be very happy if a few commodities are missing? Just as the pressure of discommodity cannot sink him to wretchedness, so the lack of commodities cannot deprive the person from being very happy. Such a person is very happy without commodities in the same degree as the person is not wretched under discommodities. Else, if the person's good can be diminished, it can be taken from that person altogether.¹⁸

interpreting Adam's and Eve's disobedience within the book of *Genesis* (*Genesis 3:8-24*).

¹⁷ As strange as "commodities" and "discommodities" sound, these words convey the Latin meaning best. The usual English words used to translate these words would be "conveniences" or "favorable" and "inconveniences" or "unfavorable", however, the Latin prefixes, *cum*, literally *with* and "discom", *dis* literally, *cut off from* and *modus*, literally, a *way* (of happening) add intensity. So, English words which would accurately convey these Latin meanings might be: measured and appropriate and not-measured or inappropriate. The words seek to describe a person's response to incoming actions or to actions arising within oneself, responses which would conform to the Stoic ideal of rational control, or actions which fit reason's measure. The problem is that Seneca's allowance for "discommodities", or "unmeasured actions or responses" is contradictory to his advocacy of suicide as a reasonable way of ending one's life.

¹⁸ Here, Seneca's argument against any "commodities" or "discommodities" in life mitigating against a wise person's happiness

A little while ago, I said that a tiny flame adds nothing to the light of the sun for any light other than the sun's light is eclipsed by the sun's brilliance. "But there are things which obstruct even the sun." Yet, even amidst obstructions, the sun is undiminished and, though some intervening object may block our view of it, the sun continues to function and travel its course. When the sun shines through a rift in the clouds, it is no smaller or tardier than in a cloudless sky; there is a vast difference between an obstruction and any impairment. Similarly, obstructions do not detract from virtue. Virtue retains its stature, only its light is dimmer. For us, perhaps, it is less conspicuous and luminous, but for itself, it is unchanged and like the sun in eclipse, virtue continues to exercise its function. Against virtue, therefore, disasters and losses and injuries have no more power than a cloud has against the sun.

One opinion holds that a wise person with physical affliction is neither wretched nor happy. This, too, is a fallacy, for it puts what is fortuitous on the same level with the virtues and assigns no higher value to the honorable person than to what is devoid of honor.¹⁹ Could anything be more sordid or scurvy than to equate the venerable and the contemptible? Justice, piety, loyalty, steadfastness and prudence are venerable. But, sturdy legs and sound and solid biceps and teeth, on the other hand, are worthless and often occur in fuller measure in the most worthless characters. Moreover, if the wise person with physical affliction will be regarded as neither wretched nor happy but left somewhere between, such a person's life will be an object of neither aspiration nor avoidance.²⁰ But, is it not the height of

contradicts Seneca's argument posited for suicide within the two letters addressing suicide. See footnote 5 (five) above for further comment.

Seneca never resolves this contradiction in any letter, as far as this author has read. Indeed, Seneca for all his logic does not even seem to recognize such a contradiction exists in these writings and, consequently in his advocacy for suicide.

¹⁹ Here again "Fortune" raises its capricious and arbitrary head! Yet, here also, as observed within footnotes 5 (five) and 18 (eighteen) a contradiction arises within Seneca's argument for suicide. If, for instance, the person who is virtuous is happy, self-contained and immune from outside "commodities" or "discommotities", then how can any such "fortuitous" accident significant or insignificant to the wise person? Seneca remains silent as to this question.

²⁰ Here again, this author finds an inconsistency within Seneca's argument

foolishness to say that the life of a wise person is not to be aspired to? Or, is it credible that any life is neither to be aspired to nor avoided? Again, if physical infirmities do not make a man wretched, they allow him to be happy. What has no power to change his status for the worse cannot interdict it from being the best.

"We know cold and we know hot," it is objected, "and what is between is tepid. Similarly, one person is happy, another is wretched and a third neither happy nor wretched". I must get to the bottom of this figure which is aimed at our position. If I add a little cold water to the tepid, it will become cold and, if I pour in more hot, it will eventually become hot. But, however much misery I pile on to your person who is neither wretched nor happy that person will not, according to your statement, be wretched. The figure is, therefore, not apposite. Again, I give you a person who is neither wretched nor happy. I add blindness. Such a person is not made wretched. I add lameness. Such a person is not made wretched. I add intense and unrelenting pain. Such a person is not made wretched. If so many calamities cannot shift such a virtuous person to wretchedness, neither can they dislodge him from happiness. If, as you say, the wise person cannot fall from happiness to wretchedness, such a person cannot fall into non-happiness. If a person has begun to slip, such a person cannot stop at any particular point. The thing which keeps a person from rolling to the bottom holds him at the top. Can a happy life not be pulled to pieces? A happy life cannot even be loosened and that is why virtue *per se* (that is, *in itself*) is sufficient for a happy life.

"But look you," it is objected, "is not the wise person happier if he has lived longer, if no pain has distracted him, than if he had always had to wrestle with misfortune?" Tell me, is he better or more honorable? If not, then neither is he happier. To be happier a person must be more upright. If such a person cannot be more upright then neither can the person be happier. Virtue cannot be stretched and neither can the happy life which is the result of being virtuous. So great a good is virtue that virtue is impervious to such visitations as shortness of life, pain and assorted physical infirmities. Pleasure does not even earn its attention.²¹

for suicide. Why should "...any life" being "to be inspiring" or "to be avoided" be relevant to any person, much less a wise person, given Seneca's insistence on a human being independent and making unaffected choices in order to be virtuous and, therefore, to be happy?

²¹ As much as Seneca's view of being virtuous coincides with Aristotle's view of the self-sufficient human being within his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and

What is the outstanding characteristic of virtue? Virtue is indifferent to the future and disregards the calendar. In an instant of time, virtue consummates good everlasting. To us these things seem incredible, seem to transcend human nature, that is, because we gauge its grandeur by our own puniness and bestow the title of virtue upon our failings. It is equally incredible, surely, that a person subjected to exquisite torture should say, "I am happy". But, the very workshop of voluptuousness heard that exclamation. "This day and that other were my happiest," said Epicurus, one of the days he was tormented by strangury and the other incurable stomach ulcer. Why should men who cultivate virtue find qualities which even the votaries of pleasure exhibit incredible? The Epicureans too, for all their ignoble and unaspiring mentality, assert that in extreme pain and distress the wise person will be neither wretched nor happy.²² This too is incredible, even more incredible. I do not see how virtue will not be precipitated into the abyss once she is dislodged from the height. Either she must keep a man happy, or, if she is evicted from this function, she cannot prevent him from becoming miserable. She cannot be dismissed while she stands. Virtue must either be conquered or conquer.

"Only to the immortal gods," an opponent says, "are virtue and the happy life allotted. Ours is but a shadow and a semblance of their goods. We approach but never reach them." But, reason is shared by gods and men. In the gods reason is perfected; in humans it is perfectible. But it is our vices which reduce us to despair for the junior partner in reason is of lower rank, too unstable for surveillance over choice wares, with judgment still unsteady and unsure. He may desire the faculties of sight and hearing, good

notwithstanding Seneca's view of being virtuous is commendatory of human happiness, this very stoic praise undermines Seneca's argument in favor of suicide as argued within his two letters addressing the issue of suicide.

²² Both Epicurus and Zeno (each the founders of their respective philosophic schools) advocated that humans act according to nature, however, each of them "read" nature differently. Whereas Epicurus stated that acting according to nature is marked by pleasure and, therefore, argued if an action is pleasurable indicates whether or not the person acts according to nature, Zeno stated that acting according to nature meant to act according to reason and argued that rational actions were devoid both of pleasure and pain. Thus, the followers of Epicurus, known as "Epicureans" and Zeno, known as stoics were bitterly opposed one to the other!

health, a physique not repulsive and in addition a longer span with faculties unimpaired. Through reason he can lead a life beyond reproach, but in the imperfect human being there persists a certain malignant force because the human mind is susceptible to distortion.²³ The badness has shown up and been exercised and is not gone; a human being is not yet a good person but is being molded into one. Anyone who falls short of good is bad.

But where "virtue and spirit are present in his frame" (*Aeneid* 5.363) a human being is equal to the gods. The human being remembers his origin and makes it his goal. It is never wrong to attempt to regain the heights from which you have descended. Why should you not believe that there is an element of the divine in what is part of god? The totality in which we are contained is one and it is god and we are his partners and his members.²⁴ Our

²³ Here is the pagan perception of what is called "original sin" within the Christian world commencing with 1 A.D. Philosophers beginning with the Pre-socratic Heraclitus, then specified by Plato and Aristotle recognized that human beings and, specifically, human reason contained a fault, a fault which permitted humans to choose to act against nature, notwithstanding the awareness that virtue resulted from acting according to nature.

Indeed, recently, an article entitled "Original Sin: A Disputation", printed in the November 1998 periodical entitled "First Things" written by one Edward T. Oakes, S.J., p. 16 wrote:

No doctrine inside the precincts of the Christian Church(es) is received with greater reserve and hesitation, even to the point of outright denial, than the doctrine of original sin. Of course, in a secular culture like ours, any number of Christian doctrines will be disputed by outsiders, from the existence of God to the resurrection of Jesus. But even in those denominations which pride themselves on their adherence to the orthodox dogmas of the once-universal Church, the doctrine of original sin is met with either embarrassed silence, outright denial, or at a minimum a kind of halfhearted lip service which does not exactly deny the doctrine but has no idea how to place it inside the devout life.

The irony of such a denial is the awareness of so-called pagan philosophers in the existence of vice and in the weakness, if not maliciousness of human beings in the attempt to be good.

²⁴ This statement is particularly interesting in the light of a specific statements attributed to Jesus Christ within the *New Testament*: the first is within John's Gospel wherein Christ states:

spirit is capacious and its direction is toward god, if vices do not press it down. Just as our bodily posture is erect and looks toward heaven, so our soul, which may reach outward at will was fashioned by Nature to desire equality with the gods. If it utilizes its powers and expands outward into its own reaches, it is by no alien path that it takes its way to the heights. A pioneer journey to heaven is a great task. The soul is retracing its path. When it has found its road, it marches boldly on, disregarding all distinctions. It casts no backward glance at riches; gold and silver which are most appropriate to the darkness in which they had been buried, the soul values not the glitter which overwhelms the eyes of the ignorant, but by the primal muck from which our greed separated them and dug them out.

The soul knows, I declare, that riches are stored elsewhere than in vaults. It is the soul which needs to be filled not the money chests. The soul we may raise to sovereignty over all things; to the soul we may commit ownership of nature, to limit its sway by boundaries of east and west and possess all things by divine patent, to look down from its treasures on high upon the rich below, not one of whom is so pleased with his own wealth as he is disgruntled at his neighbor's.

When the soul has raised itself to this sublimity, it regards the necessary burden of the body not as a lover but as a steward and it does not submit to its ward. No human being who serves his body is free. Even if you pass over the other masters who excessive solicitude for the body has contrived, its own lordliness is imperious and touchy. From the body the soul springs forth, now calmly and now with elation and never thereafter does it ask what is to befall the husk which it has left behind.²⁵ Just

I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me which bears no fruit he cuts away and every branch which does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. (15:1-27)

The second reason this comparison is interesting is St. Paul's biological comparison of the Christian's relationship to Christ as the body to the head as found within his letter to the Corinthians (*1 Corinthians: 12: 12-30*). As noted at the end of these letters, Paul and Seneca were contemporaries and the parallels within their thinking were observed by several early fathers of the Catholic Christian church as well as the Council of Trent.

²⁵ Seneca's meaning here seems to be that the soul which animates the human body and thus informs the human being comes forth from the body in the sense of a woman's womb.

as we are unconcerned about the clippings of beard and hair, so upon its departure from the human being's mortal frame, the divine soul judges that its receptacle's final destiny - whether fire shall consume it, or stone shut it in, or earth cover it, or beasts rend it - is of no more relevance to itself that the afterbirth is to a newborn child. Whether it will be thrown to the birds to tear apart or whether it be consumed, "...a prey offered to the hounds of the sea" (Aeneid 9.485), how can it concern a nobody? Even when it was among mankind the soul did not fear the threats of post-mortem terrors held out by people who thought it too little for terror to stop with death. "I am not terrified by the executioner's hook," says the soul, "or by the disgusting mutilation of a cadaver exposed to the scorn of spectators. I ask no one to see to my funeral. I commend my remains to no one. Nature has provided that none shall be unburied; if savagery cast a body out, time will dispose of it".²⁶ Maecenas has put it deftly: "I care for no tomb; Nature buries the forsaken". You would suppose this was stated by some stalwart; Maecenas did indeed possess imposing and virile gifts, but prosperity relaxed them. Farewell.

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²⁶ This is a typical attitude for a pagan and, indeed, the Orthodox Jew, however, the ancient world's view of the human body changes drastically with the advent of 1 A.D. and Christ's life, death and resurrection. The human body becomes sacred and a participant in the immortality characterized by the soul and the body as a result of the soul's extension of immortal life into the body. This is the basic reason the so-called catacomb Christians "buried" the bodies of deceased Christians in the catacombs, namely, out of respect for the immortality which the body of a Christian person would share once the second coming of Christ occurred. The so-called resurrection is both presumed and indicated within the *Gospel of Matthew*: 10:15; 11:22-24; 12:41 among other places within all four gospels.

